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RHMFISS/DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANAGUA 001155

SIPDIS  
DEPT FOR WHA/CEN AND DRL  
DEPT PASSES USOAS  
DEPT PASS USAID  
DEPT PASS MCC  
DEPT PASS BROADCAST BOARD OF GOVERNORS  
AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN PASS TO AMEMBASSY GRENADA  
AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PASS TO AMCONSUL QUEBEC  
AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PASS TO AMCONSUL RECIFE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2019/12/22  
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SUBJECT: Independent Media Continue to Suffer, While Official Media Grow

REF: A) MANAGUA 1111; B) MANAGUA 1103; C) MANAGUA 959

CLASSIFIED BY: RobertJCallahan, Ambassador, State, Embassy Managua; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

¶1. (C) Summary: As the independent media (and particularly independent radio) continue to suffer as a result of government and economic pressures, media owned or affiliated with the governing Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) continue to grow. This has led independent media to limit their broadcasts or practice self-censorship, and has provided the FSLN the ability to expand its coverage in its attempt to become the only source of information. End Summary.

Political / Economic Attacks on Independent Media Continue

¶2. (C) Nicaragua's independent media, and particularly independent radio, continue to suffer as a result of the country's economic woes and a private sector scared of supporting independent media for fear of government reprisals (ref C). As one opposition legislator described it, the private sector is afraid to advertise "for fear that the government, through its fiscal terrorism, will punish it." Financial difficulties affected the smaller radio stations most immediately (ref C), but larger radio stations have also begun to feel the impact. Beginning in November, independent Radio Corporacion and other stations were forced to decrease the hours of their daily programming.

¶3. (C) The problem is compounded by the political pressures received from the governing FSLN. Several radio stations continue to report interference with their transmitters or unexplained and prolonged power outages. The governing party also continues its tactics of using the courts to exert pressure. One example is the case of Radio Dario in Leon. This independent radio reported in September that a local university professor was receiving three salaries for doing only one job. Unfortunately, the subject of this investigative report was the sister of Leon's mayor, an FSLN militant who took office through fraudulent elections. The professor filed charges against Radio Dario, and despite the radio having the documentation to support its report, the local court accepted the charges. It undoubtedly helped that the judge in the case was the sister of the president of the National Assembly, another FSLN militant. The case is currently with the court.

¶4. (SBU) There has also been more direct pressure on the independent media. On November 10, FSLN supporters shot improvised projectile devices

¶5. (C) This combination of economic and political pressures has led many independent media outlets outside of Managua to forgo news reports in

Government-Affiliated Media Booming

¶6. (C) In contrast to the precarious situation of independent media, those affiliated with the governing FSLN are growing. Whereas independent media are having difficulty finding financial support, official media organizations benefit from multimillion dollar government advertising. Official media organizations also benefit from the government's general funds. It is suspected that with government funds, the FSLN's Channel 4 television station bought the exclusive rights for public television for Major League Baseball games, which is reported to have cost \$250,000. During the broadcasts of the games, the only commercials promoted the governing FSLN's interests - i.e., FSLN affiliated radio stations, ALBA, and President Ortega and First Lady Rosario Murillo. There were no advertisements from the private sector.

¶7. (C) Government connections also have assisted official media in improving their infrastructure. In October, independent media reported that Radio Sandino, owned by members of the FSLN and managed by the presidential family, acquired nearly 7,000 square meters of land from the City of Managua. Thanks to a city hall run by an FSLN mayor (installed after the 2008 fraudulent municipal elections), Radio Sandino acquired the land without the city council ever voting on the matter. FSLN television will also be growing. The government recently approved a project for the installation of a new transmission tower for Channel 4 television station. The new transmission tower, with a 50 kilowatt transmitter, will measure approximately 280 feet and is estimated

to cost nearly \$1 million.

Comment

18. (C) Economic and political pressures on independent media are affecting both the quality and quantity of Nicaraguans' information sources. These pressures have led to the closure of independent media (ref C). Those that continue to operate have needed to limit their broadcast hours or practice self-censorship. At the same time, the governing FSLN's media organizations benefit from state coffers to enhance their programming and/or expand their infrastructure, all the while promoting the party's interests. This combination is leading the country toward an environment where the FSLN controls the news and the people are uninformed and unable to hold their government accountable.  
CALLAHAN